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RELIGION, *the only Security to Society.*

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A
S E R M O N

PREACHED

IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. DAVID'S,

ON THE 12th OF MARCH, 1787,

BEING THE FIRST MEETING OF THE SOCIETY ESTABLISHED THERE, UNDER THE TITLE OF

The Friendly Society of Ancient BRITONS.

PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

AND FOR THE BENEFIT OF THEIR FUND,

AND RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED TO

All the Friendly Societies in the Kingdom.

By WILLIAM HOLCOMBE, M. A.
CANON RESIDENTIARY OF ST. DAVID'S, AND LATE
FELLOW OF CHRIST'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE. K

CARMARTHEN,
PRINTED AND SOLD BY J. ROSS IN LAMMAS-STREET
SOLD ALSO BY

MR. BEW, PATER-NOSTER ROW, LONDON; MR. FLETCHER, OXFORD; MR.
MERRILL, CAMBRIDGE; AND MR. PUGH, HEREFORD.

M,DCC,LXXXVII.

RELIGION IN THE PRESENT AGE
BY
S. E. R. M. O. N.

IN THE CHURCH OF ST. DAVID
ON THE 11TH MARCH 1841

THE REV. F. D. M. O. N.
OF THE CHURCH OF ST. DAVID

FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE
ALL THE FRIENDLY SOCIETIES IN THE KINGDOM

BY WILLIAM HOLCOMBE, M.A.
CANON RESIDENTIARY OF ST. DAVID'S, AND VICE
FELLOW OF CHRIST'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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TO
THE FRIENDLY SOCIETIES

ESTABLISHED
IN **ENGLAND AND WALES.**

GENTLEMEN,

PLEASE to accept this Publick Testimony of Praise, from a private Individual, who has long approved and admired the Plan of, and heartily wished every Success to, your excellent Institution. It may perhaps be some Pleasure to you to be informed, that your good Example is daily extending, and has now reached to one Extremity of the Island. I beg you will acquit me of any Vanity in this Address, and that you will not think the worse of what is here offered to your Consideration, for the Plainness of the Composition. Had it been my Intention to have impressed you with any false or flattering Ideas of my Abilities, I could easily have filled the Pages with learned Quotations from Authors never heard of by you, nor perhaps never read by me; and have artfully endeavoured to deprecate Criticism, and anticipate Applause, by commenting in a long Preface on the Beauties and Excellencies of my own Writings.---It has been my humbler but sincere Intention, to assist you professionally with my Mite, in the forwarding of this true Work of Christian Love, having never seen nor heard of any other Publication on this Occasion: And though there is nothing new in the Subject, nor any studied Elegance in the Argument, yet I need not observe to you that the most important of all Truths, are those that are
most

most known; and which sometimes receive Life and Vigour from some trifling Circumstance, which they would not have derived from their intrinsic Value and Importance. It is well known what great Discoveries have been made in Natural Philosophy, from Accidents that at first seemed of no Consequence; and he must be little versed in the History of the human Mind, who can be ignorant, how frequently we are determined on the most important Enterprises by mere Trifles; and that many a Man has been roused from Habits of Vice, into a steady Course of Duty and Religion, by Accidents, often insignificant, sometimes even ridiculous, who has long doted over his Bible, and heard and read the finest Specimens of Christian Oratory unmoved. Should any such Particularity fortunately arise here; should the Circumstances of its having been composed solely for your Use, preached before one of your Societies with Approbation, printed at their Request, and sold for their Benefit, induce you to attend to this Discourse; and should it be followed with the secret Blessing of remembering and practising it; you will have great Reason to praise God, the highest Reward and greatest Happiness that can be possibly extended to him, who is, with true Affection and Respect,

S I R S,

Your Christian Brother, and

Devoted humble Servant,

W. H.

And all our Intercourses with Civil Society. And this View, we shall discover Religion of such vast Consequence, and 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000.

THE Great End of Religion is, to make us Happy in this world and the next; and the great Reason why it is so frequently disappointed in this Godlike Intention is, that Men in the Thoughtlessness so Generally attendant on Human Nature, will not give themselves proper Time and Reflexion to apply this Conviction so forcibly on their Memories and Judgments, as to influence the General Tenor of their Conduct. The Rewards of Heaven, though infinitely beyond all our Hopes and Conceptions, being only discoverable to the imperfect Vision of our Minds, thro' the distant Perspective of Faith, too generally fail to make a lasting Impression on Hearts, daily engaged in the Pursuits of Sense. Nothing therefore can be of greater Service, than frequently to exercise ourselves in bringing this Great Maxim of Conduct, much nearer to our Perceptions --- To apply it to the common Purposes and Occasions of Life --- To Consider what Effect it ought to have on us, in our Houses, our Closets, on all our Schemes of Private Management,

and all our Interourses with Civil Society. And in this View, we shall discover Religion of such vast Consequence and Importance, and rising so far superior to Every other Rule of Conduct, that it will be impossible for us to hope to attain any Accomplishment in the Character of the Man, or the Citizen, without it. For whatever other Attainments a Man may possess, or whatever specious Principles of Morality, Virtue, Honour, or Benevolence, he may profess to direct his Conduct by; yet if the Foundation of his Character, be not laid on the only safe and steady Principle, the *Fear of God*; with all the glittering Ornaments of outward Graces, or intellectual Improvements, he becomes nothing more than sounding Brass, or a Tinkling Cymbal. For as nothing can in all Cases and Emergences, extend a Rein over all the most secret Workings of the Heart, but Religion; should this unfortunately be wanting, all will be Folly and Delusion; a Man can neither trust himself, nor give any sufficient Security to the World, for an Uniform, and constant Integrity. -- This Argument ascends with equal Force, from Individuals to Generals, from Man to Men, from the Master of the Family, to every Description of Society, and Government. For on whatever Principles of sound Policy, private or public Associations may be formed. -- Whatever Objects of great and extensive Utility they may embrace. -- Whatever laudable Means they may use in the Prosecution of their Designs; yet if they begin not in Religion, they must End in Anarchy and Decay: Every Human Project, like Man himself, however Strong his Habit or

Vigorous

Vigorous his Constitution, bringing with Him into the World, from the Womb, certain fixed Principles of Dissolution, which sooner or later must terminate in the Grave.

ON the Occasion I have now the Honour to stand before you; (for whatever may be the Occasion, I must always feel it the greatest Honour and greatest Happiness, to be the Advocate for every Measure, that intends to alleviate the Distresses, and increase the Comforts of my Fellow Creatures) I know not how I can acquit myself more suitably to your Wishes and my own, than by pursuing the Train of Thought, so forcibly suggested by my Text. Be it your Praise to have begun so Good a Work; it shall be my earnest, however feeble Endeavour, to give Stability to so excellent an Undertaking; to point out to you the only certain Method of securing its Success; that what was begun in Good Will, may be completed in the Perfection of Christian Charity; and that this First Fruit of your Brotherly Love, may be perpetuated by the only certain Instruments of Prosperity, the Grace, and Blessing of God.

OF the *Utility of your Institution*, too much cannot be said in Praise: It is founded on the soundest Principles of Human Prudence, which Provideth against the Accidents of Sickness and Distress, in the Hours of Health and Affluence, in a most happy Reference of the wise Man to the Ant, *who provideth her Meat in the Summer, and gathereth her Food in the Harvest.*

Prov.

Prov. v. 6. It has been spoken of in Terms of such high Approbation, by Men of the most distinguished Abilities and Penetration, as to be thought worthy the Notice and Imitation of Government itself; it has been attended with such good Consequences, wherever the Experiment has been made, that the Example is daily increasing; it promises a very effectual Relief to the present Mode of supporting the Poor, which is become so Extravagant and Enormous, as to be the general Topic of Murmur, and Complaint; and in its Spirit and Tendency bids fair to correct That Scandalous Meanness of Spirit, which at present so much disgraces the lower Orders amongst us; that Total absence of the Honest and Laudable Shame, *The Shame to Beg*; and Recurring on every Occasion to the Parish, for a Relief of such Distresses, as would be much more honourably and happily redressed, by Prudent Foresight and Industry. I have great Pleasure also in observing many wise Rules that you have adopted, for Preserving Peace, Order, and Sobriety among you: But as all these can extend only to outward Conduct, which will be perpetually interrupted by evil Habits and Dispositions; and as no Order or Government can be permanent or secure, that is not founded in the Heart; I shall hope to assist you very materially in this Important Part of your Design, by taking Occasion from my Text to point out to you, the Necessity and Importance of such Principles, as are requisite, not only to the Honour and Permanency of your Institution, but also to the Perfection of every Christian Virtue.

Giving

Giving then all Diligence, add to your Faith, Virtue; and to Virtue, Knowledge; and to Knowledge, Temperance; and to Temperance, Patience; and to Patience, Godliness; and to Godliness, Brotherly Kindness; and to Brotherly Kindness, Charity.

WHENCE we may observe, that Charity the greatest Perfection of our Nature, and the Sum and Substance of our Religion, however Simple to our first Apprehensions, is really composed of many distinct Branches, and cannot be attained but by a Course of successive Virtues; Each of which will be well worthy a separate Consideration here, as it will most forcibly apply to the Design of our Present Meeting.--The Apostle with great Propriety begins, where all Hopes of Success must begin, in exhorting to

All Diligence, without which no Advance or Improvement can be expected in any Pursuit. The Sentence pronounced on our first Parents Disobedience, *That Man should eat Bread in the Sweat of his Face*, Gen. iii. 19. sticks so close to the fallen Sons of Adam, that in every Pursuit of Trade, Science, or Religion, Industry is the only Channel, through which Prosperity can flow on us. Without the Rigid Discipline of Religious Exercises, Habits of Vice and Immorality must take Possession of our Hearts; without early and constant Attention to Study and Learning, our Minds must continue Stupid and Ignorant; and to bring the Matter a little nearer Home to this Occasion, even the Good Design of your Institution would be instantly defeated, if you should not be Diligent in your Respective Callings and Professions;

essions; as it is honest Industry only, that can place you yourselves above Present Want, and supply the Necessary Subscriptions, for the Support of your Fund. But as this World and its Affairs are governed by an Over-ruling Providence, against which no Wisdom or Power of Man can prevail, neither Industry nor any other Application of Ours can expect Success, if it be not founded on

Faith in God. To believe the Existence of a Supreme Being, is an Effect so forcibly and constantly following the slightest Attention to the wonderful Works of the Creation, that the Character of a Real Atheist perhaps never existed, at least has been oftener affected than felt; even Devils, the Scripture assures, *Believe and Tremble*. But common and obvious as this Principle of Faith is, it has unhappily been strangely corrupted by weak and wicked Men: though clearly the first, and most simple Conclusion of the Human Understanding, it is some Times dressed up in all the Impenetrability of profound Mystery; at other Times, it is explained in such a Manner, as totally to undermine all Religion and Morality, by superseding the Necessity of Good Works. It happened very fortunately, for the Interests of Religion in these latter Days, that this Error had crept very early into the Christian Church. From some Passages of St. Paul, on Justification, (little understood and worse applied) an Opinion had been adopted; that *Faith* alone was sufficient to Salvation. An Opinion, so fatal to every kind Intention of God to-
wards

wards Man, was not permitted by Divine Providence, to pass long unnoticed. St. James, another Writer of equal Authority, was called upon by the Urgency of the Case, to refute so dangerous an Error; and has formally concluded against it, *That by Works a Man is justified, and not by Faith only*, JAMES ii. 24. Now as it is impossible there should be any Contradiction between Two Writers, both equally Inspired, and the Obvious Inference is, that St. Paul meant *Faith* followed by *Works*, and St. James *Works* begun in, and founded on *Faith*; yet we see this Doctrine of Faith, as licentiously abused at this Time, as when St. James indited his Epistle; a melancholy Proof indeed of that Corruption of the Human Heart, which will shut our Eyes against the strongest Light. Happily however to all Sincere Minds, there is not a Possibility of Doubt in the Case. If St. Paul himself, who has been so violently pressed into so bad a Service, be allowed (what Confidence itself can't deny) to be the best Interpreter of his own Writings, He has on many Occasions; and particularly in the Words of my Text, borne the amplest Testimony against so fatal an Error, where he directs us, to add to our *Faith*,

Virtue: That is, a proper Courage in Professing our Faith before Men, and a steady Observance of all Moral Duties, which God has commanded; These very Duties, which some Enthusiasts have condemned as too much favouring of Heathen Philosophy, to be fit for Christians; and for inculcating which

St. Paul

which, some of the best * Books in our Language have been as formally Proscribed, as if they had denied the Existence of a God, or attempted to invalidate the Evidences of Revelation. But you, my Brethren, I trust, have not so learned Christ: Before you come to God, you must (as the Apostle declares, *HEB. xi. 6.*) *Believe not only that He is, but that He is a Rewarder of all Good Works, as well as an Avenger of all Wicked Ones.*—But to guard yourselves effectually against all such dangerous Delusions, it is necessary that to your *Virtue* you should join

Knowledge; A clear and steady Comprehension, of all the several Duties, that God requires of you. And great Reason have you to thank and bless God, that to Persons in your Situation, this necessary Knowledge lies in a plain and narrow Compass. That Gospel, which our Saviour and His Apostles were commissioned by the Holy Ghost to *Preach* to all the World, is now by the Direction of the same Spirit reduced

* Mr. Whitefield, in his unbounded Zeal against Good Works, directed his Disciples to burn the Works of Archbishop Tillotson, and the *Old Whole Duty of Man*: The former will be studied and admired, as long as there is any Taste for fine Writing, and Rational Religion; and the Piety, the Learning, the Judgment, and Happy Reference to the Scriptures, that breathe through all the Works of the excellent, though unknown, Author of the latter, has given them a Superiority to every Thing of the Kind in our Language. Should any Plain Serious *Christian*, ask my Opinion, what were the best Books for the Use of his Family, I could have no Doubt in answering, The *Old Whole Duty of Man*, and *Secker's Lectures on the Church Catechism*.

reduced into *Writing*; so that the whole Will of God, which was revealed to the *Ears* of the First Converts of Christianity, applies itself now to your *Eyes*; and consequently what in them was the Duty of *Hearing*, becomes in you the Duty of *Reading*; which at once silences all the present Pretences of Fanatics, to the *Necessity* of their *Preaching* the Gospel. Indeed, all that extravagant Admiration and Attention, which is often superstitiously, sometimes blasphemously, paid to *Preaching*, would be effectually checked and suppressed, if Men would, but for one Moment, reflect that *Preaching* can never be again, what it was in the Time of our Saviour and his Apostles: From their Mouths, it was the perfect *Word of Life*, accompanied with all the infallible Wisdom and Power of God; from our's, it can only be the References and Explanation of fallible Men, to, and of that Word; which though under the Management of Discretion and Learning, is a very useful Method of teaching *some*, and reminding *all* of their Duty; yet in different Hands (as we have too much Occasion to lament) it becomes the Trumpet of Schism, and the Retailer of every foolish and extravagant, nay sinful and blasphemous Opinion. The Holy Scriptures then are the only certain Guide, that God now offers, to *Christian Knowledge*: To these no Man can add, and from these no Man can diminish; and therefore if you will read your Bibles at Home, instruct yourselves and Families in the Church Catechism, and attend to the sober Admonitions and Instructions of your Parish Ministers on the Lord's Day; it is utterly impossible you

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should continue ignorant, of any one necessary Point of Duty. Many Passages of Scripture, it must be owned, are hard and difficult to be understood; but it is of no Consequence to you, whether they are understood or not; even the Attempt may be attended with Danger, as Scripture assures us, *That unlearned and unstable Men, wrest them to their own Destruction.* But without recurring to any Learning, (which in your Situation is not to be obtained) or to the Opinions of any Expounders, (who may err themselves and mislead you) you have one sure and certain Rule of Interpretation, which can not fail to inform and satisfy all your Doubts: Let the Scriptures explain themselves; the plain and clear Passages will throw a steady and sufficient Light on the difficult and obscure. If then you find it clearly revealed there, that God *batb no Pleasure in the Death of a Sinner*, Eccles xviii. 32. *But is good to all, and his tender Mercies are over all his Works*, Ps. cxlv. 9. *That we shall all be judged according to the Deeds done in our Body, whether Good or Bad*, 2 Cor. v. 10. *That when our Dust shall return to the Earth as it was, then shall the Spirit return to God who gave it*, Eccles. xii. 7. *That we are Redeemed by the Son, and sanctify'd by the Holy Spirit of God, to whom the Honour and Attributes of God are ascribed*, John i. 1. v. 18. Mat. iii. 17. Acts v. 32. 1 Pet. i. 22. Rom. viii. 14. xv. 16. John xiv. 6, 7, 8, &c. Acts v. 3, 4. Mat. xxviii. 29. 2 Cor. xiii. 13. 1 John v. 7. all the shocking and absurd Interpretations that have been given by false Religion, of Predestination, Sanctification,

Sanctification, Justification, and Faith; and the Doctrines of Materialism, Necessity, and the whole Unitarian System, which are now triumphantly extolled by perverse Learning, and false Philosophy, will immediately become exposed to your Understandings, and will vanish before this Touchstone of Truth, like Vapours before the rising Sun. But whatever Advances you may make in Knowledge, you must at the same Time always recollect, that it is your Duty to be Readers, Hearers and Doers of the Word, not *Preachers* and *Expounders*; and to reconcile you to your Duty, recollect, that you serve God more acceptably, and extend his Religion more forcibly, over the Understandings and Hearts of Men, by setting in your several Stations (what is much wanted) steady Examples of an active, godly, quiet and obedient Life; than by compassing the Earth with extravagant Preachings, or loading the Press with Volumes of Comments and Illustrations of Scripture. Obedience is the best Sacrifice that Sin can offer to Heaven; and though the Presumption of knowing better what will please God, than he has declared himself; the attoning, for omitting what we ought to have done, or committing what we ought not to have done, by some senseless and idle Services of our own, has very early (as it is to be feared it will very late) disgraced Revelation; yet it must always expose us to that severe Reproof of the Prophet, *Hath the Lord as great Delight in Burnt-offerings and Sacrifices, as in obeying the Voice of the Lord?* Behold, to obey is better

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than

than Sacrifice, and to hearken than the Fat of Rams, 1 Sam. xv. 22. But as nothing so fatally obscures the Head, as the Corruptions of the Heart, and the Dominion of strong Passions has always proved the most powerful Antagonist to Truth; the Apostle in the next Place, wisely requires of us, to add to our Knowledge,

Temperance; that Self-dominion and Government, which keeps all our unruly Appetites in due Subjection. From whence, but from the disorderly Passions of Men, arise such Corruptions of the purest Religion, every Man striving to make the Word of God subservient to his own Constitution and Temper? The gloomy and morose describe God, like themselves, delighting in Severity and Cruelty, and blaspheme the Father of all Mercies by the horrid Doctrine of absolute Predestination. The gay and lively again, by substituting Benevolence for Piety, and speciously magnifying some Duties of the *second* Table, into an actual superseding those of the *First*, render the Fountain of all Purity, the Favourer of Impiety and Uncleaness. And the Enthusiast will so explain and magnify the Merits of Christ, as to defeat the very Design of his Coming into the World, which his own inspired Apostle has declared to be, *to purify to himself a peculiar People, zealous of good Works,* Titus ii. 14. Such dreadful Havock does *Intemperance* make in Religion; and in the Affairs of common Life, acts with a more visible and more instant Destruction, as it impairs the Faculties of our Minds---ruins our Strength of Constitution---wastes and impairs our Fortunes---suppresses

suppresses all Activity and Industry---gives Vigour to Strife, Envy, Malice, and every turbulent Passion of the Soul---and will pervert even your monthly Meetings, which your Institution would dedicate to Brotherly Love and Affection, into noisy and abandoned Scenes of Blasphemy, Quarrelling, and Drunkenness. To these turbulent Evils, the Apostle suggests an excellent Remedy in

Patience; that happy Temper, which enables us to bear with the Failings of our Neighbours, and endure any Wrongs that may be offered to ourselves, with an easy and manly Composure. Private Wrongs may consist either in Injuries to our Reputations, our Persons, or our Fortunes. Against the first, our best general Security will be found in the Testimony of a good Conscience, since Accusations of this Sort are generally conducted with so much Art, as to elude a formal Trial and Conviction; and as Society has not yet found a Punishment adequate to such Injuries, which are the most sensibly felt by generous Minds, it may be the much wiser Way in general, to pass them over in Silence and Contempt: The Latter we should resist with a determined Firmness, softened however with all Temper and Moderation; we must be slow to Anger----ready to forgive----loth to punish; and where the Extremities of the Law become absolutely necessary, we should be easy to be reconciled, and always free from the Gall of Bitterness and Malice.--- The just Sense of our own Imperfections, should make us very indulgent to those of other People; and know-
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ing therefore from the History as well as the Declarations of Scripture, *that Heresies always have and ever will exist, and also not without some good Purpose*, 1 Cor. xi. 19. we should be effectually cured of all Inclination to Religious Disputes and Controversies, which are generally conducted with more Bitterness, and more Injury to the Peace and Welfare of Society, than any others. Human Nature was, and always must be nearly the same, in all Ages of the World: And if Men could be weak and wicked enough, to resist the Doctrines and Miracles of our Saviour himself, are we, because we are Members of the purest Church, to lose our Temper, because the same Folly and Perverseness is opposed to us? No, let us take the wiser Part in following the Directions of Scripture, by qualifying ourselves to give every one that asketh us, a Reason of the Hope that is in us, 1 Pet. iii. 15. And as to those that oppose themselves, instructing them in Meekness, if God peradventure should give them Repentance to the Acknowledgement of the Truth, 2 Tim. ii. 25. But to our Patience we are further exhorted, to add

Godliness; that pious Disposition of Heart, which will always incline us, so to fear God as to refrain from Sin, and so to love Him as to keep all his Commandments. This is a Principle of the utmost Importance in every Part of our Conduct, but which has been exposed to much Suspicion and Injury, from that counterfeit and affected Sanctity, which so notoriously distinguished the Pharisees of old, and is still very visible among some of our modern Sectaries; who affect the
Preciseness

Preciseness of Scripture Language on the common Occurrences of Life---lift up their Eyes to Heaven in tedious and ostentatious Prayer---inveigh most bitterly against the innocent and inoffensive Customs of the World---villify and abuse their Neighbours for Crimes that either never existed, or at least are considerably magnified by their vindictive Imaginations --- and regarding not the Beam in their own Eyes, arrogantly thanking Heaven, *they are not as other Men are*, Luke xviii. 11. Such a sour, partial, vindictive Spirit, is as far from the true Spirit of Christianity, as Light from Darkness. It was not thus the Son of God, the Lamb of Righteousness, came to redeem the World; he was all Mildness and Mercy, as well as all Truth and Purity; he thought it no Derogation from his Character to conform to the Customs and Prejudices, to partake of the Mirth and Entertainments of his Countrymen; he was in all Things (can modern Dissenters reflect on this, without Shame and Trembling) a most exact Conformist to that very Religion he came to repeal; and when called on to exercise his Authority, the severest Reproof that relenting Sin could extort from his Mouth was, *Go, and sin no more*. It was not thus his Called Apostle St. Paul propagated the Gospel over the Gentile World, *who became all Things to all Men, that by all Means he might gain some*, 1 Cor. ix. 22. Influenced by such unerring Examples, true Godliness must continue to shew itself in every cheerful and reasonable Indulgence, to the Habits and Infirmities of those we converse with; whilst it removes our own Hearts far from all vicious Compliances, and renders

renders every the most indifferent Act of our Lives, an Act of Religion, *while whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, we do all to the Glory of God*, 1 Cor. x. 31. But God is no selfish Master, he requires not that all our Services should be bestowed on him; he not only permits, but commands, that to *Godliness* we should join.

Brotherly Kindness; nay it is laid down in Scripture as the only Mark of our being true Christians; *By this*, says our Saviour, *shall all Men know that ye are my Disciples, if ye have Love one to another*, John xiii. 35. This, as your Title imports, is the very End and Spirit of your Institution; and to preserve it pure and perfect, you must take with you another Piece of the Apostle's Advice, *That there be no Debates, Envyings, Wrath, Strife, Backbitings, or Whisperings amongst you*, 2 Cor. xii. 20. *But that you be kindly affectioned one to another with Brotherly Love, in Honour preferring one another*, Rom. xii. 10. And here one Remark, of infinite Consequence to yourselves and the Public, must affect you all; that though as Fellow Christians we are all individually equal in our Hopes, Privileges and mutual Affections; yet we can not associate in any one Project, without a due Superiority and Subordination; even your monthly Meetings can not subsist an Hour, without some presiding Authority duly obeyed, to controul and regulate your Proceedings. This is universally true in every Species of Union, from the most Simple of Man and Wife, to the most complex Form of Government and Empire.

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This will effectually refute all those idle Chimeras of establishing a Government, where an exact Equality is to be preserved, and every Man still to continue his own Master. No Form of Government can be conceived, in which a Man must not surrender some Part of natural Liberty, to ensure more Ease and Security on the whole; no Church can exist, in any Order and Decency, in which private Opinion is not compelled to give Way to Public Judgment. This Reflection pursued, must expand your Hearts with Gratitude to the gracious Providence of God, for placing you under such a Form of Government, as is the Envy and Admiration of all the World; where Power is so happily controuled, that it affords the most perfect Security to our Persons and Properties, and can strike a Dread into the most potent Enemies, whilst it can not oppress or injure the meanest Member of its Community.---It would inspire you with all becoming Reverence for that gracious Sovereign, who fills our Throne with a Splendor and Magnificence, equal to the most powerful Potentate, without infringing on the Liberty or Enjoyments of the lowest of his Subjects; and who, to his immortal Honour, adorns that Throne with Virtues, to which the best of his Subjects may look up for Imitation. It would fill you with all zealous Attachment to that Church, which has restored to you the Holy Scriptures in your native Tongue; administers the Sacraments in the purest Forms; presents you with a Liturgy compiled from all the Piety and Learning that ever adorned Christianity; and has provided you with an able and independent Ministry, that

that can be under no Temptation wilfully to corrupt the Word of God, and under no possible Suspicion of materially mistaking it; so that reflecting on all this Variety of Blessings you enjoy, above every other Nation under the Sun, you would join us in making it a Part of your constant Prayer, that we may all live in the "true Faith and Fear of God--in humble Obedience to the King--in unfeigned Communion with the Church established, and in Brotherly Love and Christian

Charity, one to another." * Here the Apostle concludes his Argument, and indeed Argument and Religion can go no further, this being the Sum and Perfection of both. Whatever immediate Demands, our own or our Brother's Wants may have on us, they are not to supersede the general Claims of Human Nature. God, who extends his Blessings to all, requires that we should extend our Hearts to all; here the Gospel will admit of no Exceptions; Friends and Enemies, Countrymen and Strangers, Infidels and Believers, have all a common Claim; and, though by no Means intitled to an equal Share of our Affections, have yet equal Demands on our Benevolence and Compassion. On this Ground Christianity rises far superior to every Religion, yet presented to the World; and whilst we, my Brethren, stand on such Ground, we may be assured, no Malice of Men or Devils will ever be able to shake us. Acting on such Principles, you are not only laying the surest Foundations of the Prosperity of your present Institution, but you are

* Can. 55.

drawing

drawing down the Blessings of Heaven, on all your Actions and Pursuits. Whilst others are disputing and cavilling about Religion, you are practising and enjoying it. Whilst others are vainly and presumptuously aspiring to such Gifts of the Spirit as never can be attained in these Ages of the Church; or if they could, must at last cease and vanish away; you are possessing, the never-failing End of all Religious Perfection: And whilst Faith is perplexed with Dispute and Hope clouded by Doubt, you may rest securely on that *Charity which never faileth*, and is far Greater than both, in it's present Enjoyment here, and it's Everlasting Rewards hereafter. Which that we may all Experience, God of his infinite Mercy grant.

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Everlasting Rewards hereafter. Which that we may
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